THE END

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6 OF 6

TATO

JIM STARLIN AL MILGROM

THE END

MARVEL

PREVIOUSLY...

THANOS

LIVING TRIBUNAL

ETERNITY

INFINITY

In all-encompassing stygian darkness, Thanos tells a mysterious listener how our universe came to a tragic end and his part in its demise.

The Mad Titan relates how he gained control of the Heart of the Universe and usurped supreme power.

But the superpowers of this actuality (The Living Tribunal, Eternity and Infinity) refused to submit to Thanos's reign and gathered together an army of heroes to do battle.

The irony of this is that Thanos knows our reality suffers a terminal illness, a breakdown between the barriers of life and death. It's a prize hardly worth fighting over.

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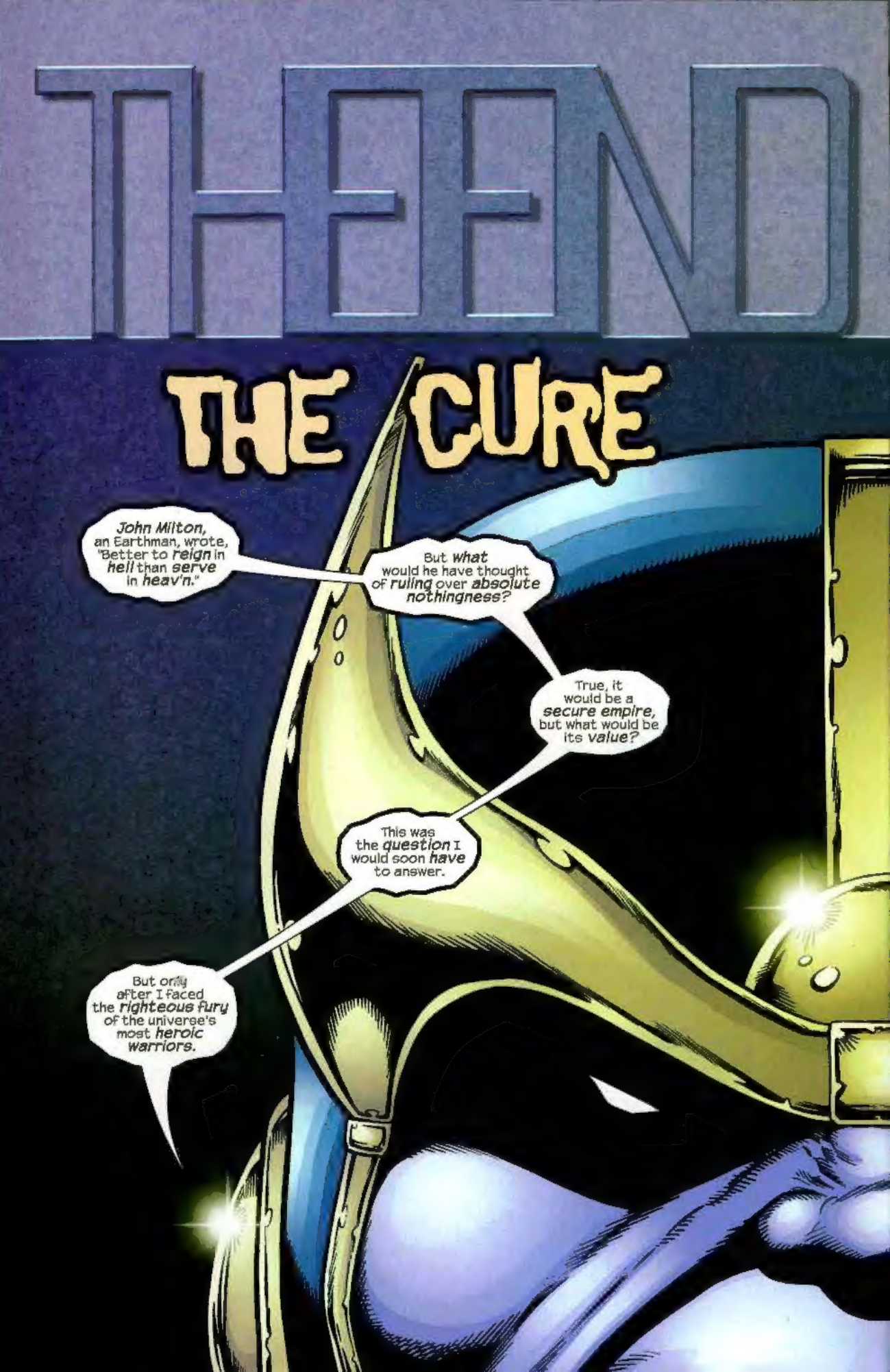

THE END
THE CURE
John Milton, an Earthman, wrote, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n."
But what would he have thought of ruling over absolute nothingness?
True, it would be a secure empire, but what would be its value?
This was the question I would soon have to answer.
But only after I faced the righteous fury of the universe's most heroic warriors.

Of course, even their combined might was nothing compared to my supreme power.

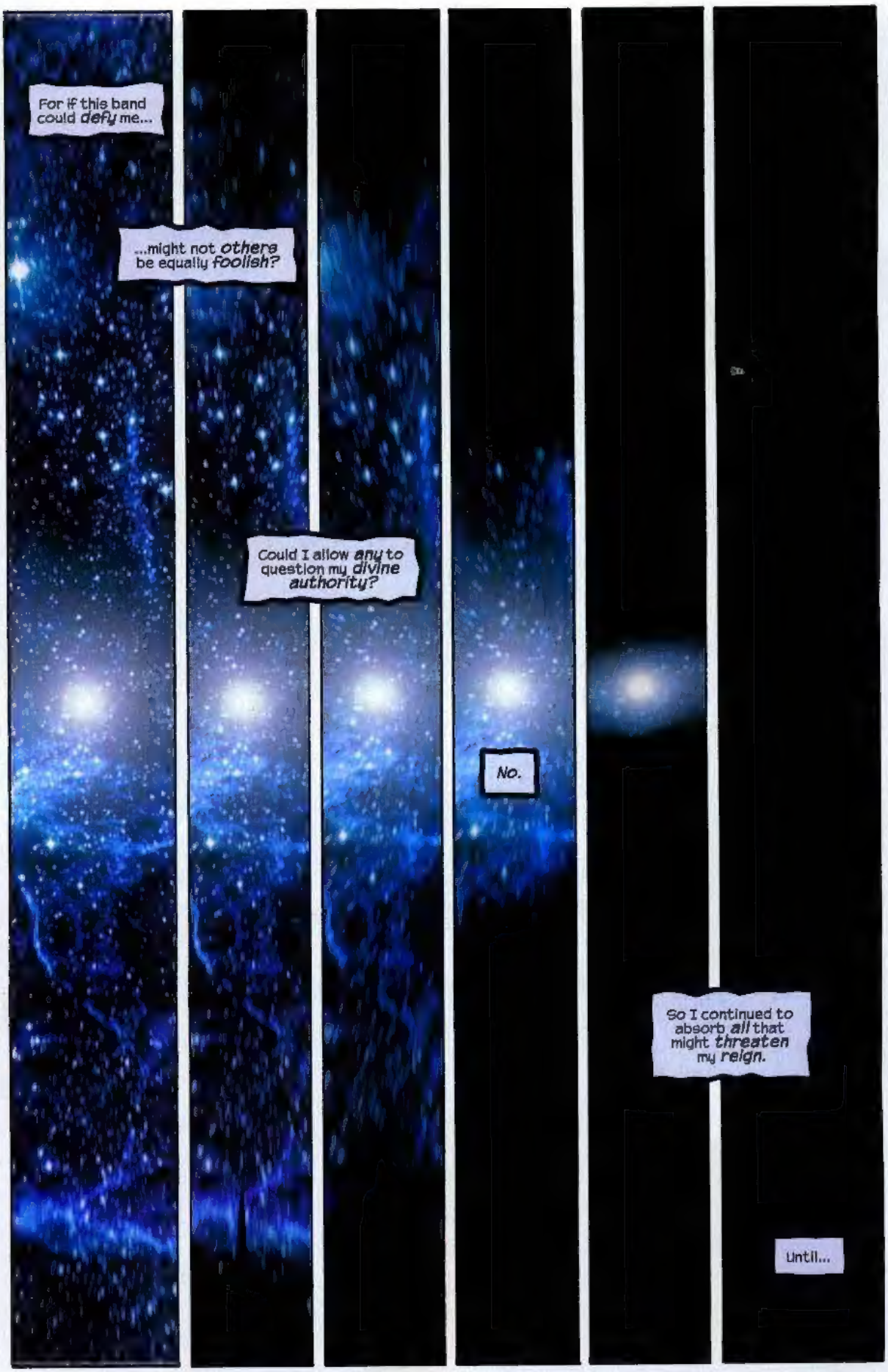
BACK!
My simplest gesture was devastation.
Incredible!
He actually destroyed a Celestial!

NOW!
The others are too close!
They will be protected.
Your compatriots have served well, Captain.
But now this be a war of gods!
But a futile effort against my omnipotence.
Yet still...
A truly impressive display of cosmic force.

It deeply and strangely angered me.
In fact, my rage was uncontrollable.
How dare these cretins defy their supreme being?
Was I not now the end-all and be-all of reality?
Their very existence was by my whim!
Yet they had the arrogance to actually attack me!
A crimson tide washed over me.
Rational thought drowned beneath it.
Divine indignation seized control.
Such grievous insults would not go unpunished.
I acted without thought, as if my response were preordained.
In retrospect, I once again consider the deviousness of my predecessor.
Was this my moment of triumph or but a facet of another's grand plan?

Of course, at that moment of blind anger, it mattered little.

The Living Tribunal, Eternity and Infinity resisted being absorbed into my being longer than the rest.
Their stubbornness fanned the flames of my fury.
Until this inferno raged completely out of control.
Not even the sweet nectar of victory could quiet the turmoil within me.


For if this band could *defy* me...
...might not *others* be equally *foolish?*
Could I allow *any* to question my *divine authority?*
No.
So I continued to absorb *all* that might *threaten* my *reign.*
Until...

Nothing remained

Who knows how long I basked in the *glory* of my *dreadful triumph.*

I savored the sweet *silence* of *oblivion.*

What *lunacy* had *seized control* of me

The *trap* was so painfully *obvious* and yet I had stepped into it, *blinded* by *injured ego.*

Never before had I acted so *precipitously.*

Impulse was *not part* of my structure.

Yet still I had *followed* a course charted by *another's hand.*

The *master manipulator* had been *tricked.*

But eventually *sanity* crept back into *influence*

And the *full impact* of what I had done sank in

I was still trying to come to terms with this *realization* when you made your *dramatic entrance.*

Thanos, what have you done?
ADAM WARLOCK, only you could somehow miss the end of the universe.
Of course, you and Gamora were outside this reality, tending young Atleza, this actuality's cosmic anchor.
A task that unexpectedly terminated.
What has transpired?
...and that is how the universe came to an end.
What next?
Next requires time and space, which no longer exist.
Only you and I remain
And I suppose I am extremely temporary in your judgment.
Adam Warlock, you have always been part of this universe but inexplicably apart from it.
That saved you, for the moment, from joining your comrades in oblivion.
But I see no reason you should now not share their fate.

Except then no one would witness your grand gesture.
I was not aware that I had one planned.
The security of the void is not your way, Titan.
Did you know, Warlock, that I have always found your self-assuredness your most annoying trait?
My unique status in this universe has always gained me insights denied to others.
That is why I understand you, better than, perhaps, you do yourself.
Why I have trusted you so many times in the past.

Grand gestures are a costly affair.
And this one more so than I am willing to pay.
Thanos, your past madness has caused the slaughter of millions.
But you have also saved billions when universal doom threatened.
Noble deeds motivated by necessity.
Were they?

Or were you assisting in righting the imbalance between monsters and those who would do the right thing?
No one has ever before accused me of altruism.
An emetic notion.
Have I been deluding myself in believing my entire life has been based on self-interest?
Of course.
We all deceive ourselves, to a certain extent.
And your entire existence has been grounded in deceit.
Look to your recent actions, Titan.
After the affair of the Infinity Gauntlet you supposedly foreswore universal domination or destruction.
You claimed to seek a peaceful existence but feared old enemies might seek vengeance over past wrongs.
So you sought to strengthen your own hand so that none might threaten you
But look where this latest quest for power led you.
Not what you expected, is it?
No, this I did not intend.
I was...
Tricked!
As much by yourself as by He whose power you coveted.
Life should be about more than pandering to one's paranoia.
You would so mock me?!

I only point out what you already know in your heart.
Thanos, you have spent centuries chasing the shadows of what you thought you should crave.
Each end achieved has proven a disappointment, has it not?
Have ever you known true satisfaction?
You seek to measure me in terms that apply to lesser beings, Adam Warlock
I am Thanos of Titan, unique unto myself!
My name itself means death.
Are you not more than a name?
I sense you are.
What does it matter now?
It's this moment I must deal with.
Sacrifice or the void are apparently my options.
You were chosen because of your will, Titan
Chosen and tricked.
A poisonous trinket was offered and I foolishly leapt for it.
A ploy you've used on many others
Not easy being on the receiving end, is it?
A situation I have not yet accepted.
Really?
I am still seeking that proverbial loophole.
Really?
Point taken
If He went to all this trouble to ensnare me, there will be no out.
Check and mate.

Time to find grace in defeat.
Not my strong suit.
Thanos, the role you play can have no understudy.
What must now be done, you alone can accomplish.
Take pride in that
Spare me your nauseating sentimentality and pity!
I chose to play the game and will accept the outcome!
Do not try to bestow sainthood upon me!
Defeat is humiliation enough!
True enough, the universe will be a better place without you.
Yet I shall still regret your passing.
There has always been something of the fool in you, hasn't there?
It will not be as it was, you know.
Death, I mean

Death will now be permanent
Never again will there be any miraculous resurrections.
No fooling or bargaining with the great divide.
Heroes will no longer be recycled.
From this point on, when they fall another will have to take their place.
The same will be true for you.
I can accept that
In many ways it will be a blessing.
Through Gamora I am now learning the value of a life well spent
I envy you that, Adam.
I have accomplished much in this existence...
.. but one goal always eluded me.
It is not you I hoped to spend my final moments with
But our individual prides were too great a barrier to breach.
Her station was also a severe impediment I never managed to circumvent
And in all honesty, the approaches I chose were rather ill-conceived.
I thought I had put this sorrow behind me.
Thanos, always the deceiver.
Especially to his own heart

But enough maudlin sentiment.
I--
There was another you overlooked in your mad frenzy of absorption, Titan.
For she, too, exists in a plane of actuality outside this poor reality.

Sometimes trying too hard is the problem.
Sometimes surrendering is the only path to victory.
MISTRESS DEATH!

Thank you, my dearest.
You spoke!
Directly to me!
I
Farewell, my love

Perhaps *that* is what I truly spent my entire life *seeking*.
It will have to be.
Is it *enough*?
Step back, Adam Warlock.
The time has come for the *final resurrection*.
The *patterns* will be *set right*.
The *cancer* will be *eradicated* from the patient.
All shall be as it *should be*.
How *ironic* that, in the end, what *Thanos of Titan* did *best* was...
...be a *healer*.

All who fell are once again whole.
But the Titan was devilish in his reconstruction, devious to the end.
Determined that none should ever think well of him.
For what has transpired is remembered by none.
No memory is there of the resurrected Pharaoh Akhenaten or anything that occurred after his spectacular debut.
For in this newly minted reality such horrors never happened.
Even the most cosmically astute are unaware of the Titan's sacrifice, his final grand gesture.
Only I remember.
An oversight? I wonder...
Yes, I can sense the universe resuming its full glory and scope.
The icons have returned to their lofty stations and the scales leveled.

Thanos...
From start to finish a creature of contradictions.
When last we met, during the Abyss Affair, I gleaned that he was once again seeking a new and awesome power source.
As he had done so many times before.
I knew that if he gained this prize it would, as always, not be what he truly craved.
Which was a love of sorts, I suppose.
The substitute would prove a disappointment.
Then again the mad anger would boil.
I feared then someone would certainly have to pay dearly for this let-down.
But never did I imagine...
...that this someone would be...

...Thanos, himself.
THE END